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INQUIRY
INTO THE

Propriety of applying to Parliament,
for the Repeal of the CORPORATION
and TEST-ACTS.

IN A
LETTER
TO

Samuel Holden, Esq;

L O N D O N

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S I R,



T is now published to the world, that the Dissenters have under their consideration the repeal of the Corporation and Test-Acts; and it appears they have generally formed expectations of having something done in it this next session of Parliament.

These movements have excited my curiosity to make the strictest inquiries I am able, to know the real causes and springs of 'em, in order to form my own judgment and conduct; that I might not be led into any sentiments or resolutions, without a thorough conviction of the reasonableness and propriety of their present scheme. In this inquiry I have not considered the Dissenters in their religious, but civil capacity, as fellow *Protestants* and *Englishmen*.

I hope, Sir, you will not be displeased if I send you the result of these inquiries, and the reasons they give, upon the grand matter of debate, to justify the steps they have taken in it, and the resolutions they have generally form'd for their future political conduct.

It is not to be concealed, that there are different opinions among them about some particular forms and seasons of acting, which have been endeavoured to be heightened by a secret management, under a ministerial direction, by representing the most dismal consequences to some of them, at private conferences, which by these few were to be sent among the rest of the people, in order to work on their fears, to divide their counsels, and to render their management ineffectual: but the body of Dissenters have been so long under this sort of management, and so often

deceived by such intrigues, that they begin both to be weary and ashamed of it, and to act up to the character of a *free people*. Should they be influenced any longer by such artful insinuations, in opposition to what shall appear to be their *right* in common with the rest of their fellow-subjects, and what they have a claim to upon all the principles of honour and political justice, the world must have a contemptible opinion of their understanding, and make them the subject of their jest.

You need not to be informed it is their unanimous opinion, that their present incapacity is a hardship; and the continuance of it is considered as a violation of that friendship, which has been so often professed by those gentlemen, to whose interest they have hitherto been immovably attached. In this opinion I find them supported by the managers of the House of Lords, in their known conference with those of the House of Commons, and which by their order was printed in the year 1702. In that conference their Lordships say, that an Englishman cannot be reduced to a more unhappy condition than to be put by law under an incapacity of serving his prince and his country; and therefore nothing but a crime of the most detestable nature ought to put him under such a disability: and they who think being present at a meeting to be so high a crime, can hardly think that a toleration of such meetings ought to continue long: to make men infamous (for what can be more infamous than such a disability?) is to exceed all bounds.

It is well known that these incapacitating laws were enacted upon extraordinary occasions, and founded upon reasons peculiar to that time. Is it then consistent with good policy and justice to continue these, when there are no such reasons to support them? where the reason of the law ceases, in all equitable construction, the law itself should cease; especially if it be considered who are affected by them, not the friends of the pretender, and arbitrary power, but the friends of the Revolution, and the Protestant Succession. These only are discouraged, and distressed.

In the history of the reign of King Charles the second, it appears to be an incontestable fact that, when a declaration for a general Toleration in 1672 was questioned in Parliament, which the next year brought on the *Test-Act*, Lord Clifford got some to move in favour of the Dissenters, hoping that the Church-party might either be offended with the motion, or the Dissenters with the refusing it: but this was prevented from incumbering the bill, by Alderman Love a Dissenter, and member for the city of London, who moved, that an effectual security might be found against Popery, that nothing might interpose till that was done; and that at present they were willing to lie under the severities of the laws, till a more favourable opportunity, rather than clog a work which their present circumstances required to be done. In this opinion the generality of them at that time concurred.

From this conduct it is evident, that the act itself, in some measure, was obtained by their assistance; and that Parliament, tho'

so zealous for the Church, and so angry and severe upon them before, had such a sense of it, that they ordered a bill to be brought in for the ease of *Protestant Dissenters*, which was prevented, by *the intrigues of the Court*, from being perfected. And is it reasonable, I appeal to the whole community, is it reasonable that *this law*, which *they* voted for, and approved of as proper, for the circumstances the nation was *then* in, in so distinguishing a manner, should be turned *against themselves*, and thereby fix upon *them* a mark of *infamous* distinction from generation to generation? Is this the kind return that must be made for their steady zeal for the *Protestant Interest*, and the *liberties* of *their* country; especially when it is considered how many favours they might have obtained from the Government, by a contrary conduct? Did angry high-church men, whose schemes of government they had always, and with a uniform zeal, opposed, come into methods of relief, and shall the Whigs, in whose power it is to help them, and upon whose account they have suffered *banishment*, *imprisonment*, and the lesser *discouragements* of the society, I say shall these Gentlemen, who have been the objects of their best wishes, neglect them after such a long scene of services? This appears to me peculiarly aggravating. Blessed be God, we have no fears from a popish king, a popish heir, or a popish court, against which this law was originally intended.

It is obvious that this incapacity has done *real mischief*, as it divides the Protestant interest, and prevents the Government from receiving that service, which otherwise the Dissenters might do, not only in their own persons, but by their influence on others: for they being for the most part engaged in the trade of the Kingdom, both as *Merchants* and *Manufacturers*, must necessarily create a considerable dependence upon them; but if by *disqualifying laws*, and the artifice of popish and high-church leaders, the people are instructed that they are men marked out as infamous, it is easy to work up their passions into a dislike of them, and thereby take off much of their influence. This was the known effect of the *Occasional-Bill*, there being many corporations which were thereby thrown into the hands of those who have opposed the measures the Government ever since: nor does my inquiry discover any real advantage, which has accrued by this incapacity. Has this reconciled any of the enemies of the *Revolution*, or of the *Protestant Succession* to the present Royal Family? are any proselyted to the Whiggish interest on this score? I can't find one instance of it.

It is high time then to attempt the *repeal* of these *laws* (by applying to Parliament, the great refuge of the oppressed) so necessary to the security of the throne, to the union and strength of the *Protestant* interest, and to the ease of so many subjects in the Kingdom, who would hereby be engaged to act with fresh vigor, and unite their *whole interest* in the service of the *Government*.

I have, Sir, upon this occasion, read over the controversy between the present Bishop of *Salisbury*, and Dean *Sherlock* now Bishop of *Bangor*; and I must own the former has in so convincing and masterly a manner shewn, that the *Test-Act* is such a notorious profanation and prostitution of the sacred institution of the Lord's supper, so inconsistent with the nature and original design of it, so opposite to the natural rights of every *Englishman*, and so useless in itself, as being in no respect equal to the weight which is laid upon it, that I should be surprized to find any honest Churchman oppose the removal of this grievance; a grievance not only to *Dissenters*, but to every serious *Clergyman* in the Kingdom; a grievance to all who have any concern for the honour of our holy religion, or regard to the liberties of men.

The reasonableness and equity of the thing itself appearing with an evidence, which, I think, no considerate person can withstand; it becomes a natural question to ask, what the *Dissenters* have done, since the *disqualifying law* was enacted, that they must be supposed to meet with any opposition in their present design, from professed friends, who have it in their power to relieve them? It can hardly be imagined, that without some real and high provocation, an oppression should be continued: it must be some *notorious mismanagement* on their part, some *outrage* or other in conduct, some unjustifiable *desertion* of their friends, at a time when their services were absolutely necessary, that must justify it. If this had been the case, if the conduct of the *Dissenters* had been turned against their old friends, all past obligations ought to be as nothing in the account; if they had engaged in an interest to undermine the measures of the Government, this must have silenced all their *complaints*, and justified a neglect of them, as wise, just, and necessary: but I don't find that any thing of this nature is hinted; the contrary to it is so notorious, that there's not a man in the kingdom but could contradict it.

I will now, therefore, enquire into those *reasons* which have been given to discourage and lead them off from pursuing their *scheme of relief*.

It is said, that the present stir among them is owing to the artifices of the *Tories* or *Antiministerial* gentlemen, with a design to divide the friends of the government at the next *Elections*.

There is no doubt but these gentlemen would be well pleased to secure the interest and votes of the *Dissenters*, and should the Whigs neglect their *application*, it must be owned they have as fair an opportunity of engaging the bulk of them in their favour, as ever happened. Oppression, continued oppression, for so many years, may make the wisest men mad: but I don't find, upon the nicest inquiry I can make, there is the least appearance of truth in the suggestion, that their present attempt is owing to any *Tory* or *Antiministerial management*. Nothing is more easy or common than

than to send abroad some plausible stories, in hopes that some credulous persons will swallow them without any farther examination. Would not every thinking judicious person first inquire what *foundation* there is for what is offered to him, especially when the affair is of such consequence and importance to their whole body, as *Englishmen*? I affirm then this is a downright *falsehood*; and I defy the Authors of this insinuation, to prove it to the satisfaction of the most cautious and timorous person. All *their ministers* know it to be false, every *layman* who has enquired at all about it knows it to be false. These are alarms calculated only to work on their fears. The original was from the *Dissenters* themselves the *last year*, and by them reviv'd again this, from the *Dissenters* at *Liverpool*, in conjunction with their friends at *Bristol*, and the main body of them all over the *Kingdom*. They in *London* have long complained; in the country they have long laboured under the inconvenience, waiting and soliciting for the year of their deliverance, but still disappointed; and the inconvenience still enlarging it self, they in the country resolved on the attempt, and communicated their resolutions to the ministers in *London*, for their concurrence. This is the *true* state of the case, this the *true* cause of the present events. To give it therefore such a *Tory* or *Antiministerial* turn, is either weak, or wicked, or both; and is only to cover over a design, which if publickly avowed, would awake the resentment of every *Dissenter* in the *Kingdom*.

Will it be asked here, have any *proper applications* been made? has the case been represented to any *Ministers of State*? have they been acquainted with the present uneasinesses, and the unanimous opinion the *Dissenters* have of their incapacities as *Englishmen*?

Upon inquiry, I find that an *application* has been made, but really I think by no means a *prudent*, or *proper* one. Their ministers, who have ever approved themselves wretched blunderers in *Politicks*, who by former schemes had well nigh broke the whole interest all to pieces, who of all men living have the worst luck in such business, as the clergy of all denominations have, it being quite foreign to the nature and design of their education and work; these, I hear, have been with a certain great man, who is esteemed and loved by the whole *Interest*, as a hearty friend to the *civil liberties* of the nation, and for whose favour in this affair they would be greatly obliged and endeavour with their united strength to make all sutable returns. This *application* was made last year, just before the *Session of Parliament*; and it is said the reason then given why the attempt should be suspended, was, that the *application* came too late; that it would be a *short Session*; that the *Business* of it was already laid, and therefore would not admit of interruption by any thing else. These reasons were satisfactory to these wise politicians.

Truly,

Truly, Sir, if these must pass for reasons, the *Dissenters* would act a much wiser part to say they will *never* ask for, or attempt it any more. All their bustle is a mere farce, and the efforts of a very silly people. Will *Statesmen* ever want such pleas, or will they be under any apprehensions when they so well know *the men* they have to deal with. 'Tis humbly presumed, that no unnecessary interruption would have been given, to have had one bill, the management of which might have been entrusted to *their* care, who are not called to constant attendance on foreign affairs. What if a bill about a particular *turnpike*, or a *naturalization* of a *particular person*, or the *exchange of lands* in a marriage settlement, or to *provide for younger children* had been a little retarded? would the inconvenience have been equal to the advantage of removing an uneasiness from such a number of his Majesty's friends?

I must, however, take notice, that tho' these reasons, such as they are, prevailed for a suspension at *that* time, yet the *great leaders* resolved to get every thing ready against this *next Session*, and to make a united attempt. Bravely resolved! And now, Sir, my inquiry brings me into a new scene. In consequence of this *resolution*, matters have been ripening in the *country*, great expectations encouraged. But, as these things were conducting with a regular unanimity, some of *their Ministers* in *London* are sent for to another conference, the reasons of which they can best explain. Being instructed that there would soon be a *new Parliament*, that *the Nation* would on that occasion be in a *ferment*, and consequently should any thing be attempted it might be of dangerous consequence at the *Elections*; and therefore tho' it is a reasonable thing, yet it is a very improper time to push it. On this Scheme all their former resolutions vanish in a moment, and their friends in the *country* receive hence the most discouraging accounts. Thus an affair of utmost importance was given up, upon a supposition that a more favourable opportunity would offer, than ever has yet happened since the act passed 1673. Groundless expectation! as if the *true reason* of neglect would not at all times and invariably produce the same effect.

However, Sir, it has produced one *good effect*; that the management of it is now entrusted with the *Lairy*, with *Gentlemen* who will distinguish between *professions* of friendship, and friendship *it-self*; who won't take up with some *general hints*, and artful surmises, nor give up their understandings to *meer possibilities* of danger; which is in their own power to prevent. This is a situation in which the affair ought to be put, and not into the hands of any *one leader*, who has declared that tho' all the M——y should oppose it, yet *he* would push it this Session, and when that comes do his *utmost* to prevent it. Is this the firmness and presence of mind necessary to bear up against difficulties? No, Gentlemen, be judges for your selves, and let

let the experience of so many years convince you, that 'tis the want of *resolution, unanimity, and acting in concert*, has alone kept you under restraints.

In general, I cannot but observe that *the impropriety of the time* has always been the pretence thro' every reign. Strange! that in the course of so many, no favourable juncture has offered! I can't account for it, unless it be that it is resolved never to be done.

If the affair is traced thro' every reign, it will appear how the *Dissenters* have resigned up their understandings to the Whigs, and complimented them with the *blindest submissions*.

In the reign of King James the Second, when he declared against the *Test-Act*, cloistered and wheedled the Dissenters, and assured them *he would settle a Toleration which should be passed into a perpetual Law, with such solemnities as had accompanied the Magna Charta, that publick employments should be opened to men of all persuasions, without any Tests limiting them to one sort only*; were they not assured that they should be made easy, and that the Church-party were sensible of their error in treating them with severity? Were these engagements made good? Let us look into the reign of King William, whose name is remembred among them with distinguishing honours. The King himself with greatest pleasure would have removed their incapacities, and every odious distinction among his subjects, but it was not thought a proper time by some about him, who would reckon it their dishonour not to be reckoned Gentlemen of Revolution Principles. The Dissenters do not enjoy the blessings of this glorious event, in that extent they had all the sacred engagements in the world to build their expectations upon, tho' they came in with their united strength to bring it about. Reasons of State were always at hand to stop every attempt of this kind, and which will be found for ever to be an inexhaustible fund, to furnish the unwilling with pretences of neglect.

And inquiry into the reign of Queen Anne will likewise discover how observant the Dissenters have been of the orders of their Low-church friends. Who were the persons that revived the *occasional bill* in the latter part of this reign, against which, such a noble opposition was made at the beginning of it? Were they not the Whigs? The Dissenters must be the sacrifice to gain a Peer on the Low-church side, of whose interest mighty expectations were formed to stop the out-cry of the Church. This was *submission with a Vengeance*. This was acting upon *reasons of state*, with such deference as will for ever be recorded in history as an instance of their inviolable attachment. One would imagine that this body of men has either no reason at all, or that they are determined never to make use of it without leave from the the Ministers of State. As some are continually pleading for a publick conscience, as absolutely necessary to the

peace and order of the Church, so others act as if every thing must submit to a *ministerial direction*, tho' contrary to the reason of every one else, who have any firmness or presence of mind left, and who are not frightened out of their wits by bugbears and dreams.

In the last year of this reign, the famous Schism Bill was carried with uncommon vigor and dispatch, in order to secure the Church; and was it not too, to make way for a *Popish Pretender*? The zeal of the *Dissenters* for the *Protestant Succession*, their firmness to the settlement of the crown of that *illustrious house*, and their steady attachment to the *Whigs*, brought this grievance upon them. Would they have fallen in with the measures of the Court, overtures of extraordinary favours were not wanting, and their grievances, so justly complained of, had been immediately redressed.

In the reign of King George the First, these laws were indeed repealed; but after how many tedious delays, on a pretence that the proper time was not yet come? Tho' there was the fullest confidence, grounded upon the highest assurances of relief, in case the *Protestant Succession* took place, yet every little turn of affairs was made use of to adjourn the year, and tho' one of the laws was laid upon them by their old friends, and the other because they were engaged in the same political interests. Nothing is more evident, even in the repeal of these laws, that they were more beholden to the firmness of his late Majesty, than to any friendship from the *Whigs*, and to the application of two eminent Aldermen of the city, who had often solicited in vain, but being quite tired with promises, and soliciting, they at length resolved to resign their places. This resolution being known, Lord Stanhope brought the bill of repeal into the *house of Lords*; but for aught appears, on the best information I can get, these laws had continued in force to this very day, had it been left to a *ministerial proper time*, or had not such a prudent and seasonable resolution been made.

Upon this view it appears, that if the *Dissenters* must make no attempt till the *Whigs* shall think it a proper time, they may wait till the dissolution of all things, by one general release at the end of the world. There does not appear the season to hope for success, till the resolution of the two worthy Aldermen becomes general; and, whatever may be the consequence, it can be charged only on those, whose neglects have made the experiment necessary.

I was tempted to have gone on no further with my inquiry, it appearing to me that the true reason is, it must never be done till the *Dissenters* make it necessary; that is, till the great men shall find their own interest connected with it, their own places, honours, and preferments. Was this the case, there would be no occasion to multiply fruitless applications, all the difficulties would

would immediately vanish, and the repeal would be both wise and just. Whatever notions we may have of a publick spirit, it is a principle with me, that persons won't serve their country for nought: nor is it reasonable they should.

Upon this principle it is evident to me, that the very reason assigned against the attempt, is the strongest argument for it. I believe it is the opinion of every Dissenter in the Kingdom, that the generality of Low-church men have no esteem, or value for them as *Dissenters*, or considered in their religious capacity; it is therefore ridiculous, a weakness not to be expressed, to expect any thing on that score. They are considered only as necessary to their own civil views, and to carry on their schemes, in opposition to others, and the more necessary they are to this purpose, the more will they be regarded and courted. At the very moment they are thought to be useless or unnecessary, they are contemptible, and will be treated as such. He must be very ignorant of the state of the world, and of the interests of it, who can conclude otherwise. Now when can the Dissenters appear to be, or really are so necessary, as at the time of electing members of Parliament: and if at no time so necessary to the Low-church interest, methinks 'tis a contradiction to common sense to suppose, if the Repeal can't be had then, it should be obtained at any other time. Nor, upon the same principle, can I suppose, that if the Dissenters were thought to be in earnest, any opposition would be made to it from those whose interest must be so apparently endangered by such an *opposition*. The true reason why the *Dissenters* are not put upon a level with other subjects, in the civil concerns of the community, must be an apprehension, that let the usage be ever so much complain'd of, ever so warmly represented as hard and severe, yet the *Whigs* are sure of their services, tho' they appear with *their fetters on*, and *their hands tied behind them* at every *Election*. Remonstrances, and repeated applications, have been, and are ever like to be fruitless and ineffectual, till they try some *other methods* of conviction that they are in earnest, and will be trifled with no more. Did they act by the law of *Retaliation*, and return kindnesses for kindnesses, and neglects for neglects, it would effectually bring about a political friendship, which would be real, lasting, and beneficial to all the *friends of the Government*; a friendship which would be the terror of all opponents, and engage all in the interests of liberty to act as one body, with the most chearful vigor.

What may they not hope for from the known wisdom, goodness, and impartiality of his Majesty, who delights in it as his honour, to be the *common father of his people*? The most generous concern for the happiness and union of all his subjects possess his royal mind, and oppression, injustice, and severity

his soul abhors. He loves his friends, nor does he fear his enemies. Is not an impartial regard to truth, an universal charity and tenderness to all, amidst our various and contradictory opinions, a generous concern for religious and civil liberty, and an abhorrence of every sort, and every degree of *Persecution* and *Oppression*, the just character of the Queen? In such a reign how great the encouragement? especially when it is known, that there is not a *Dissenter* in the Kingdom who would not sacrifice all that is dear to him, in defence of *their title, the Protestant religion, and the liberties of their country.*

If the present situation of *publick affairs* be consider'd, when can a more proper time be hoped for? These by the wise and steady counsels of his Majesty, are brought to a happy settlement, the nation is extricated out of those difficulties which required the closest attention. An *Application* therefore to *Parliament* would incumber no *publick affairs*; nor, in my opinion, does the state of our affairs at home make it impracticable.

Have we not a *Parliament* intent upon the publick good? Was there ever one within those walls more resolutely concerned for the liberties of their country? a spirit of generosity, wisdom, and liberty animates their whole conduct. There is an amiable mixture of zeal for the honour of the throne, and the welfare of the whole community in all their proceedings. From such a disposition, what blessings may be expected! what hardships removed!

But would not the removal of these *incapacities* weaken the *Church*, and raise an outcry of the danger of it, and thereby enflame the multitude at the next *Election*?

As to the danger of weakening the *Church*, upon enquiry I find, that King *William*, who was the greatest statesman of that age, was of a very different opinion. All his speeches run in a quite contrary strain. His views were to unite all his Protestant subjects, and to remove all their uneasinesses, tho' he met with the most unnatural opposition to these measures, and to many other great designs he had formed for the publick good. And as he began his reign with these truly noble sentiments, so he continued, and concluded it with a conviction of their beneficial influence. He says in his speech, *March 16, 1688. As I doubt not but you will provide against Papists, so I hope you will leave room for the admission of all Protestants, that are willing and able to serve. This conjunction in my service will tend to the better uniting you amongst your selves, and the strengthening you against your common adversaries.* And in his last memorable speech, he says, *let there be no other distinction heard of among us for the future, but of those who are for the Protestant Religion, and the present establishment, and of those who mean a Popish Prince, and a French Government. Sentiments these are worthy a Royal breast!*

These

These also were the Sentiments of *Queen Anne*, in the most glorious part of her Reign. In the beginning of this reign, in the famous conference before refer'd to, I find this declaration of the Lords: *That it is hard as well as untrue to say of the Dissenters, they never wanted the will, when they had the power, to destroy the Church and State; since in the last and greatest danger the Church was expos'd to, they joined with her, with all imaginable zeal and sincerity, against the Papists, their common Enemies, shewing no prejudice to the Church, but the utmost respects to her Bishops when sent to the Tower: and that ever since they have continued to shew all the signs of friendship and submission to the Government of Church and State.*

This likewise was the opinion of *King George the First*, who could see as far into the nature, and tendency of things, and was as well acquainted with the national interests as any man living. Thus he speaks to his *Parliament 1718*. *I could heartily wish, that at a time when the common enemies of our religion are, by all manner of artifices, endeavouring to undermine and weaken it, both at home and abroad, all those who are friends to our present happy establishment might unanimously concur in some proper method for the greater strengthening the Protestant Interest: of which, as the Church of England is unquestionably the main support and bulwark, so will she reap the principal benefit of every advantage accruing by the union, and mutual charity of all Protestants in the kingdom.*

The sentiments of these great observers of persons and things, I apprehend, may be put in the balance against those, who are of different sentiments, and who have never had such opportunities to form their judgment, and to make such wise and just observations on national interests.

If what is for the advantage of the State, is not for the benefit of the Church, I own there may be danger; but then those who are the friends of the State, would do well to consider what a slavery this must end in, for their bodies, their souls, their children, and all that is dear to them. But in truth, whoever serves his country, serves the Church at the same time. There is not a corner in the kingdom is ignorant of this.

Whenever any thing is done, thought to be a favour to *Dissenters*, it is not improbable that bigots will make this outcry of danger, but then it must be considered who makes it. They are either the enemies or the friends of the Government.

As to the noise of its enemies, I think little regard is to be had to it. It is well known what it is must please them. No body can doubt but their envy and ill-will, will be the same either way; whereas the affection and good services of those, who would be obliged, would be exceedingly increased, and their endeavours be the more active. Is it to be supposed, that the continuing the *Dissenters* under their incapacities will bring them into the measures of

of the Government? If the event may be concluded from past experience, it never yet did so. The more I inquire into matters, the more I am convinced, that their *uneasiness* is an argument of the *happy state* the nation is in. These outcries are only the groans, and struggles of expiring men, which are so far from influencing men of sense, that they are the subject of a general laugh.

But will not some *Whigs* be made uneasy by it? Probably for a season they may, but I am far from thinking there would be such numbers, as the opposers of this design would represent. It is demonstratively true, in fact, that *Bigotry* every day loses ground. Men's understandings enlarge, and the principles of liberty spread in every quarter of the Kingdom, both among the *Clergy*, and *Laiety*. The greatest part of the people have learnt to distinguish between what is taught them by their *Clergy*, with regard to their spiritual and temporal welfare, and what is only subservient to the advancement of the *priestly interest*. The prevailing opinion in *England* is *Latitudinarian*. Most men in the *Kingdom* are so far improved in their judgments, as to believe that *Heaven* is not so entailed upon any particular opinions in religion, as to sacrifice the liberties of their country in defence of them. The state of things in the nation is greatly altered from what it was forty years ago; the *Dissenters* have neither that rigidity among them as formerly, nor the *Low-church-men* that ill-will to them as *neighbours* and *Englishmen*.

Besides, the *Clergy* are not such self-denying Gentlemen, as always to oppose that interest from whence their preferments must come; and I believe whoever will be at the pains to examine the list of the *Convocation*, will find it made up of other sort of men than heretofore.

The great cry of the *Church* has ordinarily been the engine of the state, and when it has been encouraged from that quarter. Did the repeal of the *Occasional*, and *Schism* bills produce any mischief of this kind? A great deal of good, but no mischief, that I know of. I cannot therefore but think, that the danger supposed is for the most part imaginary, and only suggested to work upon the *Dissenters* fears.

But supposing, not granting, that some inconvenience may arise from the repeal, in this respect, let us consider what influence a continued neglect may have on the *Dissenters themselves*. By the best calculations I can make, it will certainly divide, and disgust them; and this will be a means to lose more votes, than may be generally attended to. Prudence therefore will suggest, that in order to avoid one supposed danger, we do not fall into a more evident one. This motion was first made from the country last year, and the disposition spreads with fresh concern to push it, even tho' some of themselves should not concur with them in such measures. This is such a situation of things as affects both *Whigs* and *Dissenters*.

It concerns the *Whigs*, because such numbers of the *Dissenters* say, that if one *sort* of them won't serve this design, they will try what *another set* of them will do in it. *Englishmen* will vote as they think fit, and without being thus at liberty, of what use is their *privilege of voting* at all? And the people sometimes are the best judges of their own interest. It is certainly their *Right*, and their *Duty* to vote for such men as they believe will contribute most to the welfare of them, and their posterity.

It likewise concerns the *Dissenters themselves*, to come to such a resolution in the city, as has the most evident tendency to prevent this *Division* and *Disgust*. Shall a supposed danger, a danger which may never happen, prevail with them to divide *their own body*, and make them *ridiculous* to all the world? If the repeal is not to be obtained while they are *united*, 'tis a jest to expect it, when that *union is broken*.

'Tis an old artifice, practised upon bodies of Men, to divide their *counsels*; this should make them the more cautious: but this artifice would always fail, if it was not covered over with some *plausible pretences*. It appears astonishing to me, that unless some *assurances* had been given last year, it should have been so easily given up. Such *managers* ought never to have an affair of such importance committed to them. Is it not a natural and just construction, that the *Dissenters* are always given up by their friends in *London*, and instead of applying to them, as *being nearer the helm*, should never more take their measures of conduct from thence? One would think that the consideration of the interest and disposition of the country should determine the *Citizens*, as was the case of the *Quakers*, when they obtained the repeal of their *Affirmation*. The *adjournment* of it to another time, has I know not how many *suppositions* to secure its propriety. It is supposed the great men will be willing to concur in it. The ground of that expectation an experience ever since the *Revolution* will discover. It is supposed that all publick affairs are to continue in a peaceful state, that there will be no ruffles among the nations of *Europe*. How likely this is I am not skilled enough in the dispositions of the several courts to determine: but if any thing of this kind should happen, it is supposed they won't be improved for a farther adjournment.

It is supposed that such a Parliament will be chose as will in an early Session, and when another election is out of sight, come into these measures. It is supposed that the *Dissenters* will vote to a man as they use to do, otherwise it may be said they have not deserved it. It is supposed that there will be the same disposition in the country, and that they won't be chagrined at all, and give it up in despair, and that there will be a perfect agreement about the propriety of the time. Upon the whole, I cannot help thinking, that a more proper time is in itself nothing else but another supposition.

I will conclude this inquiry with the reasons which six Lords gave for their dissent, when a bill of this nature was rejected in their house in 1688. They dissent, because it gives a great part of the Protestant freemen of *England* reason to complain of inequality and hard usage. Because his Majesty, as the common and indulgent father of his people, has desired this liberty for tender consciences: and my Lords the Bishops having divers of them, on several occasions professed an inclination to, and owned the reasonableness of, such a christian temper, we apprehend it will raise suspicion in some mens minds, of something else than the care of religion or the publick, and different from a design to heal our breaches. Because to set marks of distinction and humiliation on any sort of men, who have not rendred themselves suspected to the Government, as it is at all times to be avoided by the makers of just and equitable laws, so it may be particularly of ill effect to the reformed interest at home and abroad in this present conjuncture. Because it turns the edge of a law (we know not by what fate) upon Protestants and friends to the Government, which was intended against Papists. Because mysteries of religion are of divine original, and of a nature so wholly distinct from the secular affairs of politick Society, that they cannot be applied to those ends. Because we cannot see how it can consist with the law of God, common equity, or the right of any free-born subject, that any one be punished without crime. If it be a crime not to take the Sacrament according to the usage of the Church of *England*, every one ought to be punished for it, which nobody affirms. If it be no crime, those who are capable, and judged fit for employments by the King, ought not to be punished with a law of exclusion for not doing that which it is no crime to forbear.

Thus, Sir, I have finished my inquiry: whether it will be to the conviction of others I know not, it has been a guide to form my own resolutions and conduct.

F I N I S.

